

## Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 SS-15 SSO-00 NSCE-00 IO-13

INR-07 INRE-00 PRS-01 /052 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8545

INFO AMCONSUL UDORN

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HA FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: SREF

SUBJ: ASSISTANT SECRETARY DERIAN'S VISITS TO REFUGEE CAMPS IN  
THAILAND

REF: GENEVA 832

1. SUMMARY: MS. DERIAN VISITED THREE REFUGEE CAMPS DURING HER TRIP TO THAILAND. THE FIRST TWO WERE INLAND CAMPS: VINAI IN LOEI PROVINCE, AND NONGKHAI IN THE PROVINCE OF THE SAME NAME. THE THIRD WAS THE BOAT CASE REFUGEE CAMP AT LAEM SING IN CHANTHABURI PROVINCE. THE NAMES OF KEY OFFICIALS SHE ENCOUNTERED DURING THE CAMP TOURS HAVE BEEN FORWARDED BY SEPTTEL. THE NONGKHAI AND CHANTHABURI GOVERNORS HOSTED LUNCHEONS FOR HER JANUARY 17 AND 18 RESPECTIVELY. THE FIRST LUNCH TOOK PLACE IN A PICTURESQUE, OPEN AIR, WOODEN ESTABLISHMENT OVERLOOKING THE MEKONG RIVER AND THE LAO BANK IN THE DISTANCE. THE SECOND WAS IN A BANQUET ROOM OF THE NEWLY OPENED EASTERN HOTEL IN CHANTHABURI. DETAILS ON EACH OF THE CAMPS FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

2. AS OF THE END OF DECEMBER, THE VINAI CAMP HAD 12,556 REFUGEES. ALL BUT A FEW HUNDRED OF THEM ARE HMONG. THE VINAI CAMP IS  
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DIVIDED INTO FOUR SECTIONS. MS. DERIAN VISITED THE HOME OF THE LEADER OF SECTION ONE. HE HAD A FAMILY OF NINE, INCLUDING HIS WIFE, FIVE CHILDREN, MOTHER-IN-LAW, AND SISTER. MS. DERIAN THEN VISITED SEVERAL LONGHOUSE QUARTERS THAT CONSTITUTE REFUGEE SHELTERS AT VINAI, AND THE LOCAL HOSPITAL, HEADED BY A NEW ZEALAND DOCTOR EMPLOYED BY WORLD VISION.

3. AFTER HELICOPTERING FROM VINAI TO NONGKHAI, AND ENJOYING A RESPLENDENT LUNCH, THE DELEGATION WENT TO THE NONGKHAI REFUGEE CAMP. THE GOVERNOR GAVE AN EXTENSIVE BRIEFING ON THAILAND'S MOST POPULOUS CAMP. IT HELD 23,659 REFUGEES AS OF JANUARY 18. THE TWO LARGEST ETHNIC GROUPS WERE THE LAO AT 16,231 AND THE HMONG AT 5,666. THAI DAM, CHINESE, AND VIETNAMESE MADE UP THE BALANCE.

4. THE GOVERNOR CITED SEVERAL PROBLEMS IN THE CAMP. ONLY 1,500 OF THE 4,000 SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN WERE IN SCHOOL. (THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS ARRANGED TRANSPORT FOR STUDENTS BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN CAMP AND TOWN.) ANOTHER PROBLEM WAS THAT SOME OF THE POOR AND UNEMPLOYED THAI IN NONGKHAI FELT THAT REFUGEES, PARTICULARLY WITH THE DISTRIBUTION OF FREE RICE, RECEIVED BETTER TREATMENT. A THIRD PROBLEM WAS THAT THERE WERE LIMITED JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE REFUGEES. ONLY ABOUT 100 WERE ABLE TO GO TO WORK EACH DAY IN TOWN. FINALLY, CONTROL OF THE REFUGEES WAS DIFFICULT. THE CAMP WAS NOT A DETENTION CENTER, AND THE REFUGEES COULD GET OUT EASILY.

5. THE CAMP HAD SHOWN A DRAMATIC POPULATION INCREASE OVER THE PREVIOUS SEVERAL MONTHS. DURING THE PAST TWO WEEKS, HOWEVER, THERE HAD BEEN FEW ARRIVALS BECAUSE OF THE RTG POLICY SINCE NOVEMBER 15 THAT REQUIRES LOCAL DETERMINATION OF REFUGEE STATUS BEFORE ADMISSION TO THE CAMP. (THE NONGKHAI DETENTION CENTER, AS OF JANUARY 18, HELD 916 OF THESE INDIVIDUALS.)

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6. NORMALLY, 250 TO 300 REFUGEES LEFT EACH MONTH FOR RESETTLEMENT ABROAD. THE FIGURE WOULD REACH BEYOND 500 FOR JANUARY, HOWEVER. REFUGEES FROM THE CAMP WENT TO FRANCE, AUSTRALIA, GERMANY, AND BELGIUM, PLUS A VERY FEW TO CANADA. CHAMNAN SAID HE SYMPATHIZED WITH AMERICANS BECAUSE OF THE LARGE NUMBER OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES WE HAD ALREADY ADMITTED, BUT THE UNITED STATES WAS A RICH COUNTRY THAT COULD ACCOMMODATE MORE OF THEM THAN THAILAND. HE UNDERSTANDS THAT THE HMONG TEND TO BE LESS EDUCATED THAN OTHER REFUGEES, BUT THEY PROVE TO BE EXCELLENT LABORERS IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES BECAUSE ONE HMONG DOES THE EQUIVALENT WORK OF THREE THAI.

7. THE GOVERNOR SAID THAT BUDDHISTS ARE HUMANITARIAN, BUT BUDDHISM HELD THAT ONE MUST TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF BEFORE TAKING CARE OF OTHERS. HE NEVERTHELESS HAD MADE THREE PROPOSALS ON THE REFUGEE PROBLEM TO HIS MINISTRY OF INTERIOR SUPERIORS. ONE WAS FOR LOCAL SETTLEMENT CENTERS WHERE EACH REFUGEE FAMILY WOULD HAVE FIVE HECTARES (2 ACRES) OF LAND, BUT THE SETTLEMENT WOULD INCLUDE BOTH REFUGEES AND THAI. THE RTG COULD NOT BE PUT INTO THE POLITICAL POSITION OF DOING MORE FOR REFUGEES THAN FOR ITS OWN CITIZENS. THE THANIN GOVERNMENT HAD APPROVED THIS PROPOSAL IN PRINCIPLE BUT THE PROPOSAL WAS CURRENTLY IN ABEYANCE.

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8. THE GOVERNOR SAID THAT HE HAD ALSO ASKED THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO AUTHORIZE SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND FOR THOSE REFUGEES WHO HAD THAI CITIZEN RELATIVES WILLING TO GUARANTEE THEM. THERE WERE 2,000 TO 3,000 SUCH REFUGEES IN THE NONGKHAI CAMP. THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR HAD NOT YET REPLIED TO THIS PROPOSAL. HE HAD ADDITIONALLY RECOMMENDED TO THE MINISTRY THAT THOSE REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED AFTER NOVEMBER 15 BUT WHO HAD RELATIVES IN THE CAMP BE RELEASED FROM JAIL OR THAI DETENTION CENTERS, AND PERMITTED TO JOIN THEIR RELATIVES IN THE CAMP. NO REPLY HAD BEEN FORTHCOMING ON THIS RECOMMENDATION EITHER.

9. THE NEXT SPEAKER WAS THE ELECTED REFUGEE REP. HE SAID THAT 80 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE IN THE CAMP WANTED TO GO TO THE US, BUT THAT OUR CATEGORY REQUIREMENTS WERE TOO RESTRICTIVE. HE SAID THAT A FREQUENT PROBLEM AMONG THE REFUGEES WAS MENTAL DEPRESSION BECAUSE OF IDLENESS, BOREDOM, AND HOPELESSNESS. MS DERIAN REPLIED THAT SHE WOULD SHORTLY BE MEETING WITH THE UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES IN GENEVA, AND THAT SHE WOULD USE THAT OCCASION TO URGE GREATER INTERNATIONALISM OF RESETTLEMENT OF INDOCHINESE REFUGEES ABROAD. SHE ADDED THAT THE  
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AMERICAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES WAS MORE THAN POLITICAL. HUMANITARIAN CONCERN WAS PARAMOUNT.

10. AFTER THE BRIEFING, MS DERIAN MADE AN EXTENSIVE TOUR OF THE CAMP ON FOOT. A LAO REFUGEE PRESENTED HERE WITH A LETTER ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT CARTER, AND A WOODEN BAS-RELIEF IN A CIRCULAR FRAME OF THE PRESIDENT. HE SCULPTED THE BAS-RELIEF, WHICH IS BEING MAILED TO WASHINGTON, FROM A TINE NEWSPAPER PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PRESIDENT IN TANDEM WITH THE KING OF SAUDI ARABIA. MS DERIAN VISITED THE HOMES OF SEVERAL REFUGEES, AND THEN OBSERVED AN IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION OFFICER PROCESSING CASES IN THE HMONG SECTION OF THE CAMP.

11. AFTER ARRIVING THE FOLLOWING DAY BY HELICOPTER AT LAEM SING, MS DERIAN RECEIVED A BRIEFING SHEET FROM THE GOVERNOR. IT LISTED THE CURRENT CAMP POPULATION AT 1,052. SINCE THE CAMP'S ESTABLISHMENT ON SEPT 29, 1976, THE ONE ACRE SITE HAD HOUSED 2,724 REFUGEES, THOUGH OF COURSE NOT ALL AT THE SAME TIME. OF THOSE WHO HAD LEFT FOR RESETTLEMENT ABROAD, 744 HAD GONE TO THE US, AND THE REST TO FRANCE, AUSTRALIA, BRITAIN, SWITZERLAND, NEW ZEALAND, WEST GERMANY, BELGIUM, AND HONG KONG.

12. THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL OFFICER WAS ON HAND. HE SAID THAT A MOBILE TEAM FROM HIS OFFICE VISITED THE CAMP EVERY THURSDAY, AND HAD ALREADY X-RAYED OVER 800 OF THE INHABITANTS FOR TUBERCULOSIS. SOME 200 WOMEN IN THE CAMP HAD SIGNED UP FOR FAMILY PLANNING. THE TEAM GAVE THE WOMEN INJECTIONS WHICH PREVENTS CONCEPTION FOR 90 DAYS.

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13. MS DERIAN THEN INTERVIEWED SEVERAL REFUGEES INDIVIDUALLY. ONE, A UNIVERSITY GRADUATE FLUENT IN ENGLISH, HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED FROM VIETNAM. HE HAD MADE FIVE UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE BEFORE GETTING OUT ON THE SIXTH TRY. ANOTHER WAS A KHMER FISHERMAN OF MINIMAL EDUCATION WHO HAD COME THREE MONTHS PREVIOUSLY FROM CAMBODIA. THE THIRD WAS A SINO-VIETNAMESE WITH AN AUNT IN THE US. THE KHMER TOLD MS DERIAN THAT HE HAD SEEN CORPSES OF CHILDREN WHOM KHMER SOLDIERS HAD DISEMBOWELED BECAUSE THEY DID NOT MEET THEIR WORK NORMS.

14. MS DERIAN VISITED SEVERAL REFUGEES IN THEIR HUTS, AND CLAMBERED ONTO A FEW REFUGEE BOATS. SHE

WAS PLEASED WHEN MANY OF THE REFUGEE CHILDREN AND  
ADULTS GREETED HER IN ENGLISH. SHE CONCLUDED HER VISIT  
TO LAEM SING BY GRANTING AN INTERVIEW TO HENRY KAMM  
OF THE NEW YORK TIMES.  
WHITEHOUSE

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